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Research in New Zealand at the Alexander Turnbull Library

by Gerri Kimber

As the recipient of the 2015 Friends of the Turnbull Research Grant, I was fortunate to spend a month in Wellington, researching at the Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), which houses the world's largest collection of material pertaining to Mansfield. I have been fortunate to visit the library before, but it was wonderful to be able to devote an extended period of time on the collection, following up leads and various avenues of enquiry, without the ticking of a clock beckoning me back to Europe! My forthcoming biography, *Katherine Mansfield's Early Years*, will be published by EUP some time next year.

Some of you might remember us posting a copy of a previously unknown poem in a recent newsletter (see no. 18, August 2014). The poem is called 'Limbo' and I discovered it last year amongst the Middleton Murry archive acquired by the ATL in late 2012. As it was not signed and was unknown, there was some doubt as to whether it might in fact have been by Murry himself. However, having now located a second copy in the archive, I think it is reasonable to claim that the poem was written by Mansfield. It's a strange little poem, written in 1911, shortly after the *Earth Child* cycle.

During my time in Wellington, I was invited to give three talks. The first was at the ATL itself on 4 August when I gave a talk entitled 'Tea, Zen and *Cosmic Anatomy*: The mysticism of Katherine Mansfield'. In the talk I explored Katherine Mansfield's spiritual development during her life, culminating in her decision to enter Gurdjieff's 'Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man' in Fontainebleau in the autumn of 1922, claiming that 'I want to be all that I am capable of becoming so that I may be – [...] a child of the sun'. It is hoped that a version of this talk will be published in the next volume of the *Turnbull Library Record* (2016). On 5 August I was invited to give a talk on behalf of the Katherine Mansfield Birthplace Society, who work so tirelessly to maintain the house in Wellington where Mansfield was born. This talk took place in the marvelous setting of Wellington's City Gallery. Here I discussed my poetry find in Chicago, to a very receptive audience, eager to find out more about these exceptional poems. Finally on 18 August, I was invited to talk to the U3A at the Paramount, Courtenay Place, an iconic venue in the heart of Wellington. Here I discussed Mansfield connections with Poland, via Floryan Sobieniowski and Stanislaw Wyspianski. A version of this talk has recently been published in *Katherine Mansfield and Continental Europe: Connections and Influences*, edited by Janka Kascakova and myself.

Even though it was winter in New Zealand, the inclement weather could not dampen my enthusiasm for this wonderful city that Mansfield knew so well. I hope to return again very soon!



Gerri with Nicola Saker, President of the Katherine Mansfield Birthplace Society, and Emma Anderson, Director of the Birthplace.



Tea, Zen and *Cosmic Anatomy* at the Turnbull Library, Wellington



City Art Gallery, Wellington